

February 14, 2023

RE: H 148 An act relating to raising the age of eligibility to marry

Dear Chair LaLonde and Members of the House Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Lynn Stanley, and I am the Executive Director of the Vermont Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW VT). I am writing to express our support for H 148 An act relating to raising the age of eligibility to marry. This bill proposes to raise the age at which a person may obtain a civil marriage to 18 years of age.

NASW VT strongly supports this bill as our ethos as social work professionals dictates we support social change for vulnerable populations and H.148 is in line with these values.

Studies on child marriage in the United States indicate girls who are married as children have an increased risk of living in poverty, a lower level of educational attainment, and an increased likelihood of having children as a teenager. However, the more concerning issue with child marriage is that sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds do not have the same legal rights and responsibilities as legal adults. Children who are coerced into marriage by their parents, often at the urging of adult men who promise a 'better life' or to avoid a statutory rape charge, are then further trapped by the legal system. Child marriage is a tactic used by child traffickers to further control their victims. Children cannot file for divorce or rent their own apartment - they cannot sign legal documents.

New York and Massachusetts recently set no exceptions statutes banning child marriage. New York has had thousands of child marriages over the past years. Vermont is poised to become the destination state for those shopping for more lenient child marriage statutes.

Vermont is a leader in establishing policies that support child welfare. Legislation that prevents the granting of marriage licenses to minors would further this good work.

We ask you to continue to put the welfare of Vermont children first by supporting H. 148.

Respectfully submitted,

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